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STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL TO
THE MASSACHUSETTS BOARD OF EDUCATION
FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

General Council Accomplishments

Since the mid-year report, the Student Advisory Council has successfully accomplished the following four activities:

1. Opposed the regulation of out-of-school behavior by educational organizations;
2. Worked with the Department's Civil Rights Task Force to expand the definition of civil rights as applied to students;
3. Conducted a press conference on student priorities for educational reform; and
4. Testified on proposed legislation.

Specific Accomplishments on Task Force Objectives

The Occupational Education Task Force designed an evaluation tool which was used in program audits in five regions. The task force members identified several issues of non-compliance and worked to remedy these problems.

The Basic Skills Task Force attempted to follow the progress of basic skills testing proposals included in the educational reform packages. The task force members began to research possible existing models of student participation in teacher evaluation.

The Social Issues Task Force drafted a booklet containing proposed models for recognizing student achievement in schools. Task force members participated in Department coordinated Methods of Administration audits in four regions.

The Special Education Task Force proposed a student information press package on Chapter 766. Task Force members began a review of existing student workshops on the Special Education process. Finally, task force members offered suggestions to update of the Student's Guide to Chapter 766.

The Curriculum and Instruction Task Force worked to promote partnerships between school systems and the business community. The task force members organized support for sections of the educational reform packages. Finally, the task force members began research on the need and value of local school mediation boards and fairness committees.

In each case, the task forces have made recommendations to assist future task forces in setting objectives in order to continue the work of this year's council.



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PREFACE

The Student Advisory Council to the Massachusetts Board of Education was established by Chapter 1009 of the Acts of 1971. The passage of the legislation was the result of support from members of the State Board Education, former Commissioner Neil V. Sullivan, former Executive Deputy Commissioner Thomas Curtin and the Commissioner of Education's Youth Advisory Council. Former Governor Francis Sargent also played a large role in the process.

The Student Advisory Council is comprised of eleven Regional Councils and one State Council. Students in each public high school in the state, as well as many private schools, elect two student delegates to one of the eleven Regional Councils. The Regional Councils, in turn, elect four delegates to the State Council. Finally, the State Council elects its own officers, including a chairperson who sits as a full voting member of the Massachusetts Board of Education for a one-year term. The other officers include a secretary and a moderator who handle the administrative details of the State Council.

INTRODUCTION

The 1984-85 State Student Advisory Council to the Board of Education continued its efforts to complete its objectives stated in the midyear report. Some of the task forces began new objectives after reexamining or completing their earlier work and

after considering the changes in the educational reform movement. Information about the accomplishments of the specific task forces may be found in their respective reports.

The Council, as a whole, addressed a number of issues beyond their previously established task force objectives. First, the Council discussed the proposed policies of the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, and some local school districts, concerning student use of drugs and alcohol. The Council members recognized and supported the need for local school officials to prohibit substance use by students during school time, or at school sponsored events. However, the Council members strongly opposed attempts by any school related organization to regulate students' out-of-school behavior.

Second, the Council discussed its interpretation of civil rights as applied to students in response to a request from the Department's Civil Rights Task Force. The Council had a much broader interpretation of civil rights than the task force membership and urged the task force to devote attention to increasing awareness of

constitutional rights as applied to all students, especially in the area of the school-based rules which may limit individual freedoms. We recommend that next year's Council continue to strengthen its relationship with the task force and promote the broadening of the task force's interest in the effect of school rules and their application of student civil rights.

Third, the Council conducted a press conference at the State House, to inform the public and the Legislature of its priorities for educational reform in Massachusetts. (Please see appendix one). The Council intends to increase its efforts to publicize its positions on all issues in the future.

Fourth, Council members testified on proposed legislation. The Council testified in favor of Senate Bill 68, an act to create a position of a voter registration specialist in schools, and offered amendments to clarify the bill. The Council testified in favor of Senate Bill 78, an act to mandate school breakfast programs. Finally the Chairperson testified at a legislative hearing in Maryland in favor of the creation of a position for a student member of the Maryland Board of Education.

In conclusion, we had a very successful Council. This is due in part because of increased attendance and support of the Council by Department professional staff. However, the Council is still hindered by a lack of support from school administrators who do not recognize the importance of the work of the Council. In

addition, two regional councils lack the necessary professional support to fulfill their objectives.

OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE

The Occupational Education Task Force successfully fulfilled its main goal "to assist in the evaluation of Occupational Education Programs in Massachusetts schools". Task force members participated on audit teams from October to May. Evaluations were conducted in five regions and involved a total of about ninety-four programs.

The process and evaluation instrument developed by the task force at the summer leadership seminar was accepted by the Division of Occupational Education and included as part of the comprehensive evaluation package. As a result of student participation on program evaluations, several issues of concern have been raised:

1. It appears that the requirements of student participation on advisory committees is lacking in many programs.
2. Many cases of lax safety practices were observed in shop settings, and particularly concerning the use of safety glasses.
3. Students from the Springfield region did not participate on evaluations because of a concern by Department staff over the liability of student involvement.

After citing these problems in our midyear report, we worked on finding solutions. Although we made some progress in these issues, we strongly suggest that next year's task force build on the following list of our results:

1. The task force should work with the Division of Occupational Education in an effort to notify all Chapter 74 schools of the requirement and responsibility to have student members on their advisory councils. We brought this to the attention of the Division of Occupational Education this year.
2. To clarify the issue of staff liability for student members of evaluations, monitoring and audits, we met with Department legal council to clarify liability. The Department is not liable for students who are transported privately to evaluation sites. However, the Department would assume some liability if a student was injured during the evaluation.
3. To ensure that each geographic region statewide is represented on the 1985-86 Occupation Education Task Force, we wrote a letter to the advisor of the Council suggesting that a special effort be made to achieve this.

As our term comes to a close, we are very happy to have attained our primary and secondary goals with much success. We have been

well received by both the evaluation teams and the schools we visited. There is no question that the participation of students adds a new dimension to the evaluation process and generates information that might not otherwise have been available to the Department.

While we are disappointed that our term has ended we hope and strongly recommend that next year's task force continue to exercise leadership in this objective. The task force would like to thank Ms. Elaine Cadigan and Dr. David Cronin of the Division of Occupational Education for the help and total support for the work of the task force.

Finally we would like to especially acknowledge the assistance of Mr. James Shiminski of the Northeast Regional Education Center, Division of Occupational Education. It is through his guidance, wisdom and support that we were able to fulfill our goals.

BASIC SKILLS TASK FORCE

The Basic Skills Task Force met most of the goals which were developed at the 1984 summer leadership seminar. However, our work proved insignificant since much of it had been accomplished by previous task forces and the Basic Skills Advisory Committee. Most of our confusion stemmed from the basic skills provision in House Bill 6262. As a task force we had great difficulty keeping up with the changes in the bill, and could not always understand

the complex aspects of the numerous amendments. Because of the bill changing, we had difficulty keeping our surveys updated.

In December, the task force identified a new area of interest and regrouped into a Teacher Evaluation Task Force. We began planning the development of a pamphlet on how students and their teachers could participate in teacher evaluations. We hope that next year's council will continue our work on a teacher evaluation handbook. Sources available are the ERIC file, and the Needham Public School's "Format Evaluation System". Also, the task force should consider whether or not there are tasks associated with new legislation on basic skills.

SOCIAL ISSUES TASK FORCE

The Social Issues Task Force came up with three objectives in August. These were:

1. To encourage school systems to recognize student achievement;
2. To improve discipline policies of local school system; and
3. to support the adoption of evaluation of teachers by students within local school districts.

In conjunction with our first objective, we decided to compile and distribute a booklet of methods for recognizing the generally unacclaimed or "everyday" student. In September we researched

information pertaining to the recognition of student achievement. We also recorded many of our own ideas to use in the booklet. During October, November and December, we compiled all of our information and wrote our booklet. The pamphlet has been submitted to the Department for editing and type-setting. Upon the approval of the Department, the pamphlet will be published and disseminated to school administrators.

In response to our second objective (improving discipline policies), we coordinated the Council's comments on the proposed Department publication on school discipline. Later in the year, the Basic Skills Task Force assumed the responsibility for our third objective, supporting student participation in teacher evaluations.

In January, the task force members assisted the Department in piloting Civil Rights audits. Task force members attended meetings and training sessions in order to become responsible auditors. We provided a valuable resource for the Department because we were able to gather information from our peers during audits in four regions.

We feel that we have had a successful year, and we would like to suggest the following ideas to ensure the success of future task forces:

1. Have more information available at the beginning of the year by conducting more thorough research;

2. Meet between the regular Student Advisory Council meetings; and

3. Have more objectives at the beginning of the year in case a fallback objective is needed during the year.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE

The following report has been divided up into our several objectives to give detail about our difficulties and our accomplishments.

Public Service Announcements, Newspaper Columns and Information Packets

These are ways to disseminate information to the public and to connect regional levels with our efforts. We wrote and developed a sample column, announcement and information packet. We had planned to have them forwarded to the regional centers to distribute the information to local newspapers, cable TV, radio stations and Special Education departments, but were not able to fulfill this objective. The information packet consisted of information from Student Service Centers to let the public know that there was updated Special Education material available for their perusal. The news letter and announcement served the purpose of informing the people of the resources of the Student Service Centers. We believe that the centers are not not recognized adequately as a resource for understanding Special Education and the Chapter 766 laws.

Workshops

Our task force had planned to develop workshops, and then video tape them for the public. We had a member with video equipment. We came to realize that the workshops were not produced easily. There are other organizations which provide workshops on Special Education issues. We believe that it is possible to find workshops already developed and pass them on to the regional levels to perform in schools, and that this would be an effective dissemination strategy. There were two areas that we wanted to cover in our workshops: information for students and parent of the rights and laws of Special Education, and increasing the comfort level of parents and elementary school students with the Special Education process. A good example of this is the Kids On the Block Program, which can be found at any regional education center.

Audits and Information about Education

Student participation on audits this year was inconsistent. The times were changed and the students were unable to make arrangements to attend them. It is very important to obtain information about the dates of audits at the beginning of the year and to distribute this information to the members. The Special Education hearings are very difficult to attend because people involved in the case must consent to allow observers to be present.

Special Education Booklet Revision and Special Education Commission

Our task force revised the booklet, A Student's Guide to Chapter 766 to the best of our knowledge. However, there are many proposed changes in the regulations which would effect the information in the booklet. The Special Education Commission provides a great opportunity to link the task force with the new changes in this area. Marlene Biffa of the Division of Special Education, helped us to develop our revisions and will continue to be available for the task group.

Conclusion

Our task force felt that a full understanding the Special Education was the most important step in developing objectives. Our time was used up easily with our other commitments, and we realized a period must be set aside for each goal we made in advance. The 1985 Special Education Task Force hopes that the future task forces will learn from our experiences and will grow and achieve more in this area.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION TASK FORCE

The 1984-85 task force on Curriculum and Instruction began the year with two goals. At the mid-year point, we added a third. They were:

1. To encourage partnerships between school systems and the business community which will improve educational opportunities for students;
2. To organize support for the educational reform package and to develop alternative strategies to enact certain sections of the package if they were not accepted in the fall; and
3. To investigate and develop information regarding model mediation boards and fairness committees to better focus on the ideals of "student discipline in a democratic society".

The Curriculum and Instruction Task Force continue to participate on the Community Education Advisory Council through our student membership. Because of this contact, during the spring months members of the task force, and the council at large, attended workshops in four regions conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Education Interdisciplinary Committee on Advisory Councils. We recommend the task force should continue to strengthen its contacts with such councils to assure student representation and visibility.

The support organized for the educational reform package was limited in scope and, in general, a difficult undertaking. Although our efforts were sincere, we found that our information

regarding the bill and its amendments was outdated or obsolete by the time we met. When the bill was defeated in the House the task force members tried to stay abreast on the new initiatives in the area of educational reform.

At best, we succeeded in staying informed, but our lobbying efforts were curtailed as our energy turned to our new objective.

At mid-year, this task force began to investigate the possibility of developing an information packet or pamphlet to address the need and value of mediation boards and fairness committees. We discussed the use of such programs with several professionals. We found there is some, but little, information on model programs in Massachusetts. However, research has been done in other states.

We recommend the new Curriculum and Instruction task force pursue this activity. Some valuable resources may be: Dan French, Greater Boston Regional Education Center and Albie Davis, District Court Department, Law Related Education.

